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Amendments to the Claims

Sub 27. (previously amended) An electronic commerce system comprising:
a club manager web site to create a club, the club manager web site including a registration component to register users as club members, and a credential creation component to create a value token associating a selected club member with entitlement to a benefit and to cryptographically sign the value token to create a credential;

at least one affiliate web site communicating with the club manager web site to receive the credential directly from the club manager web site, the at least one affiliate web site including a credential verification component to verify the authenticity of the value token of the credential, and a benefit provision component to provide the benefit to the selected club member on demand if the value token is valid; and

at least one club member communicating with the club manager web site to register for the club and to request the benefit, and communicating with the at least one affiliate web site to receive the benefit from the at least one affiliate web site without further interaction between the at least one club member and the club manager.

28. (previously submitted) The system of claim 27, wherein the club member is anonymous from the perspective of the club manager and the at least one affiliate.

29. (previously submitted) The system of claim 27, wherein the club member comprises a user's personal computer and web browser.

30. (previously submitted) The system of claim 27, wherein the value token comprises a randomly selected transaction identifier associating the club member with the benefit, but not identifying any characteristics of the club member.

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31. (previously amended) A method of securely passing a value token representing entitlement to a benefit between web sites in an electronic commerce system comprising:

registering a user as a member of a club by a club manager web site;
authenticating the club member and offering the benefit to the club member in a link to an affiliated web site;
generating a value token associating the club member with entitlement to the benefit due to membership in the club;
cryptographically signing the value token;
communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site directly to the affiliated web site without storing the signed value token by the club member;
verifying, by the affiliated web site, that the signed value token is valid;
providing the benefit to the club member by the affiliated web site when the signed value token is valid without further interaction between the club member and the club manager web site.

32. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, further comprising registering the signed value token as used by the affiliated web site, thereby preventing the club member from subsequently obtaining the benefit.

33. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, wherein the club manager web site and the affiliated web site are operated by different entities.

34. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, further comprising billing the club member web site, by the affiliated web site, for the benefit delivered to the club member.

35. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, further comprising verifying, by the affiliated web site, that the value token has not been previously used by any club member.

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36. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, wherein the value token comprises a randomly selected transaction identifier associating the club member with the benefit, but not identifying any characteristics of the club member.

37. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, wherein the value token is unique for a combination of the club member, the affiliated web site, and the benefit.

38. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, wherein communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site to the affiliated web site comprises passing the signed value token as part of a form post to the affiliated web site.

39. (previously submitted) The method of claim 31, wherein communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site to the affiliated web site comprises passing the signed value token in a dynamic hyper text markup language (DHTML) link by using a web browser of the club member.

40. (previously amended) An article comprising: a machine accessible medium having a plurality of machine accessible instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by at least one processor, the instructions securely pass a value token representing entitlement to a benefit between web sites in an electronic commerce system by

- registering a user as a member of a club by a club manager web site;
- authenticating the club member and offering the benefit to the club member in a link to an affiliated web site;
- generating a value token associating the club member with entitlement to the benefit due to membership in the club;
- cryptographically signing the value token;

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communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site directly to the affiliated web site without storing the signed value token by the club member;

verifying, by the affiliated web site, that the signed value token is valid;

providing the benefit to the club member by the affiliated web site when the signed value token is valid without further interaction between the club member and the club manager web site.

41. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, further comprising instructions for registering the signed value token as used by the affiliated web site, thereby preventing the club member from subsequently obtaining the benefit.

42. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, wherein the club manager web site and the affiliated web site are operated by different entities.

43. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, further comprising instructions for billing the club member web site, by the affiliated web site, for the benefit delivered to the club member.

44. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, further comprising instructions for verifying, by the affiliated web site, that the value token has not been previously used by any club member.

45. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, wherein the value token comprises a randomly selected transaction identifier associating the club member with the benefit, but not identifying any characteristics of the club member.

46. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, wherein the value token is unique for a combination of the club member, the affiliated web site, and the benefit.

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47. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, wherein instructions for communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site to the affiliated web site comprises instructions for passing the signed value token as part of a form post to the affiliated web site.

48. (previously submitted) The article of claim 40, wherein instructions for communicating the signed value token from the club manager web site to the affiliated web site comprises instructions for passing the signed value token in a dynamic hyper text markup language (DHTML) link by using a web browser of the club member.

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